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ABSTRACT

This paper uses passages from Thomas Pynchon's novel, "Gravity's Rainbow," to examine basic concepts, explaining that the process of identifying the basic word-concepts in literary texts is to some extent a tension between anticipation and unexpected frustration. The paper focuses on an interpretation of the basic concept "paranoia" from Pynchon's novel. It presents passages from the novel that illustrate a simultaneous realization of several meanings of paranoia, noting a metaphorical transformation of the basic meaning "disease" from the semantic structure of the medical term rendered by non-medical contextual meanings into the world-concept. It suggests that Pynchon is a living classic of American postmodernist literature, noting he has developed a postmodernist sensibility that is a new cultural paradigm. The paper asserts that Pynchon rejects conventions and dogmas and makes the contexts of vision entirely new. This is achieved by stretching language and applying a method of pragmatic multiplicity. Molding the basic concepts, Pynchon presents an involuted case of the individual and his fate within the community. The paper concludes that Pynchon's postmodernist sensibility through his basic concepts can modulate paranoia into poetry and that the paranoid vision is extended across countries and time itself. (SM)

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The Basic Concepts in Thomas Pynchon's "Gravity's Rainbow"

The Cognitive Basic Concepts perspective assumes that language learning is a by-product of a focus on meaning – on acquiring some specific topical content. Learning and teaching foreign concepts in class offers easy, friendly atmosphere and is based on cross-cultural awareness. Since it means to come to terms with different basic concepts in different cultures, which have a significant global importance. Language learning and literature study are interdependent and should be always considered as complementary at all stages in the educational process. From this point of view we presume that basic conceptual analysis in literary novels leads to ever-increasing appreciation of a writer's artistry in and through language.

Defining the term "concept" it should be underlined how important it is to outline the conceptual system of the whole novel in order to understand the purport of the author. The term "concept" serves as a unit of *lingua mentalis*, or as a sign of the psychical resources of man; it's an operative unit of content for memory, and of the conceptual system. It is a world picture represented in human mind.

Concepts may arise in the process of inferring information from any literary text, while it might include not only the objective information but imaginative one as well. Moreover concepts sum up variables and merge them to some constancy under one label. They seem to hold data about the world and act like building elements for the conceptual system of the whole text. They provide subjective experience due to the impact of categories and groups that are worked out by the society.

Any concrete polysemic word renders its own model of the objective reality. Obviously the inseparability of objective content and observing subject must be definitely taken into

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account not only in linguistics but also in teaching and learning methodology. Moreover the position of the observer in relation to the language observed and described is far more significant. Nevertheless concepts render self-regulating and self-steering properties shifting the text into a conceptual system. The word being in itself a model of the real world becomes the center of the whole. In addition every word-concept is the center and every center is unique and is related with the top level of the semantic pyramid. To what extent it is associated to the top of the chart, determines its validity and accessibility to the literary text (see the drawing).

Through presentation of some passages from Thomas Pynchon's novel "Gravity's Rainbow" we make this point clear. Although it is extremely challenging to spot such a basic concept, which may possess the shining light of hidden multiplicity (i.e. cognized reality by the author) but we presume that it should be achieved through interaction and great experience in literary text interpretion.

The process of identifying the basic word-concepts in literary texts is to some extent a tension between anticipation and unexpected frustration. However this is an incessant seeking of probabilistic variants: nonstop comparison and analysis – dropping less probabilistic alternatives and then constant synthesis of the obtained results until achieving the non-final decision to form a new cognitive concept – a new meaning. This assumption is significant for linguistics as well as for psychology in the study of the mind. This kind of approach to the study of stylistic effect of cognitive concepts is considered as the basic feature in molding word-concepts in modernistic literary texts.

Consequently, every addressee (reader) in the system: text-reader and every addresser (author) in the system: author-text, thinks creatively. Moreover any process of creation is of stochastic nature. Presumably, stylistic effect of forming a word-concept may be also viewed as an interactive process of the creating mind and it can be investigated not only from the viewpoint of linguistic analysis but in a way as the process of cognition in reference to some issues of artificial intelligence.

Before giving elaborate interpretation of the basic concept *Paranoia* from Thomas Pynchon's "Gravity's Rainbow a short account (precis) of the novel should be given. The content-based factual information of the novel is the following: the main character antihero Tyrone Slothrop, an American lieutenant, is stationed in London during World War II Blitz. The lieutenant possesses a bizarre gift: his erections anticipate German rocket launchings. Discovered, he runs for it, to escape being taken over as a pure instrument. Gradually he becomes his own myth, known only as Rocketman... Noteworthy, the latter has a derogatory meaning in British informal language – *a man who committed unworthy and disrespectful actions.*

Representing all the mankind schematically Slothrop is disturbed with the injustice, corruption and wickedness reigning all around him. He loudly voices his indignation and wrath, yet eventually he gets himself involved in this paranoic stream of events. This is all described and best exemplified by a set of passages in which both figurative and literal sides of the word ***paranoia*** are revealed*.

Creating a conceptual system it is indispensable to start with initial or original concepts, out of which the others might derive later. e.g. paranoiac(n) (adj.); paranoid (n)(adj.). Concepts as text code-breakers are subjected to further modifications and precisions. Although at the beginning they seem unlikely to be subjected to seminal analysis or fragmentation, but later as part of the conceptual system they are under the impact of other concepts and get organized in the whole conceptual space. So that immediate contexts with initial concepts get in touch with other derived ones in the conceptual space and through loose associations new information is being inferred.

The interpretation of any verbal sign in general may be done on three different levels: immediate, analytical and synthetic. This is a socio-semiotic approach to the process of understanding highlighting the fact that everything that constitutes a verbal sign of something is meaningful. This approach to meaning is not usual. It takes into account not

* Cf. Meskhi Ana, Semantic and Functional Peculiarities of Scientific Terms in Literary Texts. Tbilisi, 1990 (Kandidat dissertation performed under my guidance, L.Jokhadze).

only immediate grammatical, lexical and stylistic levels but also the meaning of events it is related to.*

If we look up English concise dictionaries we read that ***Paranoia*** as a medical term (from Psychiatry) is defined as "mental disorder characterized by systematized delusions as of grandeur or persecution". A serious illness of the mind in which sufferer believes that he/she is hated or is being purposely mistreated. This specific meaning turns into the key concept for the whole novel and becomes *number one concept*. It is through simultaneous interaction of several meanings of the word that we infer additional information. It characterizes modern society with all attached vices: 1. any abnormal state, 2. mental case, 3. satanic evil power of destruction and degradation, 4. any wrath poured out due to injustice, 5. aimless propaganda to "improve" the situation, 6. the atmosphere of fraud and deception created by officials in the state establishments, 7. corruption and immorality disguised under the mask of kindness and nobleness, 8. devaluated virtues of degraded society, 9. an exclamation of surprise or wonder etc. a euphemism of God like Gosh; nonsense that has a kernel of truth.

Worth noting that the concept is not any of these readings, nor is it their arithmetic sum, but it is the result of having all these in mind at one time. Such ambiguity or multiplicity is indispensable for rendering modern literary texts in logical terms. It is a post-modernist sensibility or a cultural paradigm, or more precisely a new aesthetic cognitive function of the word. This phenomenon is labeled as a counter culture in art and literature.

We present some passages from T. Pynchon's "Gravity's Rainbow" that illustrates a simultaneous realization of several of the above enumerated meanings of *paranoia:*

(I) *Pointsman has been talking about* ***paranoia*** *and the idea of the "opposite". He has scribbled in The Book exclamation points and how trues all about the margins of Pavlov's open letter to Janet concerning the sentiments d'emprise, and the Chapter LV, "An Attempt at a Physiological Interpretation of Obsessions and of* ***Paranoia****" – he can't*

* Waard J.D., Nida E.A, from one language to another, USA, New-York, 1986 (75).

help this bit of rudeness, although the agreement among the seven owners was not to mark up The Book – it was too valuable for that sort of thing, they'd had to put in a guinea apiece.(101)

(II) *Thus the official version. Grandiose enough. But Generaldirektor Smaragd and colleagues are not here to be told what even the masses believe. It might almost– if one were* ***paranoid*** *enough – seem to be collaboration here, between both sides of the Wall, matter and spirit. What is it they know that the powerless do not? What terrible structure behind the appearances of diversity and enterprise?* (192).

(III) *Proverbs for* ***Paranoids****, 1: You may never get to touch the Master, but you can tickle his creatures* (276).

(IV) *It came to him: what if it's some mauve turn-of-the-century tale of ghostly revenge and this hair here's some First Step... Oh,* ***paranoia****? You should've seen him going through all the combinations as he moved around doing lavatory things among the stumbling, razor-scraping, hacking, sneezing and snot-crusted inmates of Psi Section.*

(V) *"You are a witch",* ***Paranoid*** *that he is, he smuggles down under the counterpane with the long-legged sorceress, lights a cigarette, and despite endless Tchitcherines vaulting in over the roofless walls with arsenals of disaster all for him, even falls asleep, presently in her bare and open arms.*(343)

(VI) *Rain drips, soaking into the floor, and Slothrop perceives that he is losing his mind. If there is something comforting – religious, if you want – about* ***paranoia****, there is still also* ***anti-paranoia****, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long. Well right now Slothrop feels himself sliding onto* ***the anti-paranoid*** *part of his cycle, feels the whole city around him going back roofless, vulnerable, un-centered as he is, and only pasteboard images now of the Listening Enemy left between him and the wet sky.* (506)

(VII) *Ass you're on their side. It's a great swamp of* ***paranoia*** (38).

Hence due to frequency of usage Paranoia becomes stylistically marked in the novel. Moreover the author tries to call the reader's attention by giving his own definition thorough serious considerations of the term at the very beginning:

"If we plot the frequency of word ***Paranoia*** *sub n against its rank-order n on logarithmic axes, babbling into her silence, even her bewilderment graceful, "we should of course get something like a straight line... however we've data that suggest the curves for certain – conditions, well they're actually quite flatter in the upper part then progressively steeper – a sort of bow shape ... I think with this chap, this Roland, that we're on to a classical paranoiac -"*

"Ha." That's a word she knows. "Thought I saw you brighten up there when he said 'turned against'"

" 'Against', 'opposite', yes you'd be amazed at the frequency with this one".

"What's the most frequent word?" asks Jessica. "Your number one".

"The same as it's always been at these affairs", replies the statistician, as if everyone knew: "death"(36).

We observe a metaphorical transformation of the basic meaning "disease" from the semantic structure of the medical term rendered by non-medical contextual meanings into the word-concept. The multiplicity or potential ambiguity expressed by the medical term is used as a literary stylistic source to generate the conceptual system of the novel. In this case the writer finds the traditional mode ineffective and seeks vitality in more widely popular material. The constituent parts of the medical term **Paranoia** are organized and systematized in cohesion on the basis of various stylistic devises particularly due to sophisticated interaction and interconnection of several meanings: in examples II, VI and VII we observe the consecutive (step by step or gradual) realization of several meanings, while in all others (I, III, IV, V) synchronous (instantaneous) realization of several meanings.

If we apply the method of loose association to the afore-said examples we detect that example number VII reveals the interaction of 1,2,3 meanings, from the above list of realized and obtained meanings. Number I reveals meanings 1 and 2; number III realizes simultaneously meanings 6,7, and 8; number IV renders meanings 4 and 9; number V – meanings 1 and 7; number VI reveals the interaction of meanings 1, 2, 3 and 4; number III – illustrates all the meanings in an epigrammatic conclusion as if summing-up all the connotations in one word-concept, giving it academic interpretation likewise Biblical proverbs. While defining the term from the beginning the author brings to light unexpected aspects of semantic properties of the word, charging it with new energy. Moreover the medical term **Paranoia** being used in every example is accentuated and shadowed by its opposite *Anti-Paranoia*. In addition it is indirectly associated through stylistic allusions to Biblical stories: ***paranoia*** *and the idea of the "opposite". ..... The Book.....not to mark up The Book.(I) about* ***paranoia****, there is still also* ***anti-paranoia****; .....the* ***anti-paranoid***(VI). Presumably its opposite in meaning – antonym alludes to the Bible.

The above-mentioned immediate contexts are easily interpreted due to the common knowledge of the reader (thesaurus, education and cultural background). It takes no efforts to render the information from the immediate or minimum context in which the word ***paranoia*** occurs. From the perspective of the whole text a complete indefiniteness gets started in the title. During the cognitive processing of the word its local context is just a small section of the overall text processing. It is important to mention that a certain inter-subjective space is being created between the sender and receiver (the author and reader). The edge of the semantic structure of the word is being pushed off including the past, the present, the near and the remote. The goal is a new synthesis, a new unity and new subtlety, which means that semantic transformation obtains heuristic values. The ***paranoia*** is implicitly associated with the word combination from the title of *Gravity's Rainbow*, where the both words are polysemic and indicate the author's mythological viewing of the world. The data about the words from the dictionary are the following:

Gravity **1.** the natural force by which objects are attracted to each other esp. that by which a large mass pulls a smaller one to it. It is one of the four fundamental forces of nature; **2.** anything that is dropped falls towards the ground because of the force of gravity; **3** (formal) worrying importance: He doesn't seem to understand the gravity of the situation; **4.** seriousness of manner – Grave, center of gravity.

Rainbow: **1.** an arch of different colors that sometimes appears in the sky after rain; **2.** (fig) They've painted their house (in) all the colors of the rainbow (=in many bright colors); **3.** (cultural note) People think of the rainbow in connection with the Bible story of the Flood, in which God sent a rainbow as a promise that there would not be another great flood like the one Noah had lived through; **4.** In another old story, a crock (=a large container) of gold (*AmE* pot of gold) is found where a rainbow meets the ground; **5.** phrases like "at the rainbow's end" are sometimes used in speaking of people who find (or hope to find) what they always wanted, as if by magic (Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture. UK 1992).

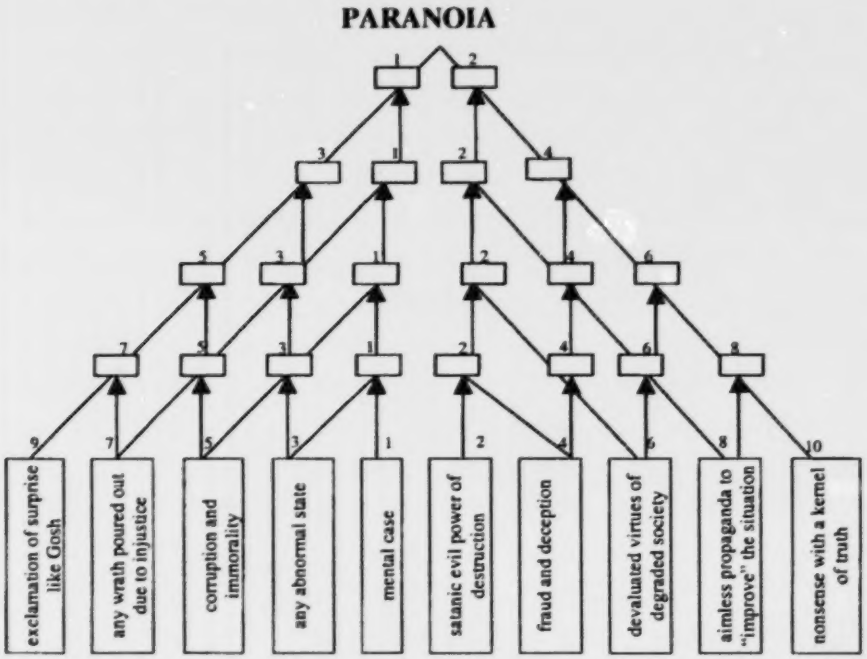
If we look closely into the definitions, the following meanings are interacted: meanings 1, 3 and 4 from *Gravity* and meanings 1, 3, 4 and 5 from *Rainbow*. They are implicitly connected with the word ***paranoia***, the definition of which is given in the above context by the author himself: *we've data that suggest the curves for certain – conditions, then progressively steeper – a sort of bow shape* ... The indefiniteness or nebulous associations shift these words into cognitive concepts: *gravity* (tendency to attract something), *rainbow* (bow-shaped minds) *and paranoia* (catching virus of attracting more and more inflicted members of society). They are stylistically marked and become the basic concepts for the whole text. In this case we can talk about linguistic predictability, which is specified as dimensional. The whole process of transition from semantics to information is traced schematically by the above-mentioned Stratified Phased Model, a construct, which objectively reflects the psycho-linguistic process of the reader's adaptation to the word and its multiplicity in the whole text and then recurrent movement back again to the word (see the drawing).

The reader starts to form linguistic predictability from the title. This is the case not of linear reading (horizontally) but it implies the reading of the whole text both horizontally and vertically. The multiplicity generated by the basic concept **Paranoia** is the effort of the univocal term of science to measure the immeasurable equivocal language. Every part of whole is the whole itself. The part doesn't merely represent the whole but it is identical with the totality to which it belongs. The basic concept becomes the key term, the center of many overlapping circles of cognitive metaphors. It embraces not only immediate contexts but the whole conceptual space – mega context. This is the information conveying process, which eventually raises a wider problem of the over-all semiotic constancy – the indefiniteness of the word. **The infinite potential of the word-concept penetrates into the whole novel, miraculously organizing and systematizing the whole text**.

Having achieved an "allegorical life" when incidents are like myths, Th. Pynchon seems to have predicted in the spontaneous language of events whatever might be rendered in the chosen words of basic concepts. The reader glories in the title assuming its multiplicity. The concept-word in the title reveals different aspects of the novel and consequently the purport of the author. A deep lingo-semantic analysis of the scientific term ***paranoia*** features metaphoric transformation of the common sema *catching virus,* which includes the whole afflicted society with an incurable disease, doomed to be perished. This concrete stylistic information relies on the simultaneous multiplicity or interaction of several meanings. The coordinative meaning is a complex cognitive concept which is important not only from stylistic perspectives but from text interpretation and cognitive linguistics as well. The simultaneous interaction of meanings gives birth to new informative potential of the scientific term. Semantic shifts of the meaning or shaping the concept is characteristic not only of the addressee but of the addresser as well. Since when reading it is perceived that the reader co-creates with the author and the spirit and presence of the creator is implied.

In order to describe and illustrate the kinetics of springing up basic word-concepts connected with simultaneous realization of several meanings of a word, it is plausible to

apply a method of technical systems and present this complex process as a hierarchical dynamic multi-level system.


PARANOIA
exclamation of surprise like Gosh
any wrath poured out due to injustice
corruption and immorality
any abnormal state
mental case
satanic evil power of destruction
fraud and deception
devaluated virtues of degraded society
aimless propaganda to "improve" the situation
nonsense with a kernel of truth

Worth noting, that technical terms when applied to literary texts reveal not only conceptual space but they also make up the foundation to the system of literary figures – tropes. Thus the basic word-concepts expressed by technical terms elucidate the author's outlook of the world in self-assertion and self-organization. In this particular case the basic concepts generate new information, which is a great depression of spirits because of the world's inevitable doom – to be perished. Nevertheless it might be beaten up, with our interpretation of word indefiniteness – an incessant everlasting entity.

Since the category of semantic indefiniteness of the word potential (IP) is already universally recognized it stands a chance against recreating new meanings of the basic concepts. Presumably the word broaches a wider problem of entropy that implies measuring the immeasurable – the infinite. The reader spotting the *catchword* or basic

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concept of the literary text remains in constant dynamic truth-oriented movement through taking yes or no options. In the long run he attempts to come nearer to the truth.

Thomas Pynchon a mysterious, publicity shunning author is a living classic of American post-modernist literature. All of his fiction is similarly structured: a vast plot is unknown to at least one of the main characters whose task is then becomes to render order out of chaos and decipher the world. This project devolves also upon the reader who must follow along and watch for clues and meanings in his novels. This is a new trend in art or in literature, which is named postmodernism. It means cutting edge of the word to reveal its potential for ambiguity. To put it another way Thomas Pynchon has developed a postmodernist sensibility, which is a new cultural paradigm. He rejects conventions and dogmas and makes the context of vision entirely new. This is achieved through stretching language and applying a method of pragmatic multiplicity. Molding the basic concepts he presents an involuted brilliant case of the individual and his fate within the community.

In conclusion Pynchon's post-modernist sensibility through his basic concepts can modulate *paranoia* into poetry. The paranoid vision is extended across countries and time itself. For he employs the metaphor of entropy i.e. the gradual running down of the universe. This desperate attitude of the author can be contradicted by applying the afore presented cognitive model of hierarchal semantic pyramid. Any divine word if it reaches the top of the pyramid purifies or renders order out of any paranoiac environment as "The Words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times" (Psalm 11.6).

Consequently, Thomas Pynchon, XX c. American living classic equipped with cutting edge technology of his day is concerned with the same ever-vulnerable problems that started long-long ago with Adam's time. The only difference is in amassed experience, knowledge and scientific data from all spheres of life. So the same anguish and wrath only increased enormously are described with appropriate technical terms from various branches of sciences.

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